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Mt. Vernon, Lisbon vie for state of Iowa's Great Places initiative

Cities join with "Creative Corridor"

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Sun news

As of last Wednesday, Mount Vernon and Lisbon, in conjunction with what is being called the "Creative Corridor," have officially completed an invitation to participate in the Iowa Great Places initiative.

Mount Vernon and Lisbon had contemplated a joint application, but agreed to apply for the program next year.

"In the discussions [between Mount Vernon and Lisbon], as an individual location we would be a great candidate, but we are not necessarily in a state of readiness" to apply individually for the initiative, said Karla Steffens-Moran of the Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation board.

The Iowa Great Places program, unveiled by Gov. Tom Vilsack and Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson in October, is designed to "promote bold thought, innovation and entrepreneurship to cultivate the unique and authentic qualities that make places in Iowa so special."

These "special" places throughout the state will be selected by a citizen's advisory board as pilots for the Great Places Program.

The term "Creative Corridor," the brainchild of University of Iowa student body president Mark Kresowik, refers to the corridor region between and around Iowa City and Cedar Rapids.

Kresowik, who wrote the letter of invitation for the creative corridor, made a presentation Wednesday, June 22 at Hills Bank in Mount Vernon to Lisbon and Mount Vernon residents, asking the two communities to

join with the corridor in an application to the Great Places initiative.

In the invitation letter to the citizens advisory board, Kresowik wrote, "...energy and collaboration is sparking downtown renewal, economic growth, a host of cultural and community-enriching activities and engagement of diverse groups," adding "the Creative Corridor region is exactly the 'great place' described by the Iowa Great Places Initiative. You can feel the energy, it ignores county lines and city limits, and the creative spirit has permeated the culture and vision."

Dee Ann Rexroat, who said Kresowik made "a great presentation and argument for why Mount Vernon and Lisbon should join with the corridor 'invitation,'" is the point person for the urban and rural aspects of the project. Beryl O'Connor is Lisbon's primary representative.

In a conversation with the Sun, Kresowik said that three places in the state will be selected for the initiative. "We are probably the most developed in terms of working together," said Kresowik of the corridor.

The final proposal for Iowa Great Places is due Sept. 1, and Kresowik said that the announcement of the three "great places," selected by an advisory board, will be made in early October in Iowa City.

According to the Iowa Great Places website, government agencies (including a coach) will work together with the three great places "to stimulate ideas and planning, streamline access to available state resources, help leverage local and private resources, and share technical expertise. The Great Places initiative will also bolster the state's other successful economic tools like Vision Iowa and the Iowa Values Fund."

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